

CSCE NEWS RELEASE

Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe

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Commission Briefing on Human Rights in Kosovo Announced

**For Immediate Release
February 3, 1997**

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Washington, DC—Today the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, also known as the Helsinki Commission, announced a forthcoming briefing:

Human Rights in Kosovo

Thursday, February 6

10:00 am-12:00 noon

1310 Longworth House Office Building

Washington, DC

Open to Members, Staff, the Public and the Press

Questions Will be Taken from the Audience

The speaker will be:

Alush Gashi, M.D., Ph.D., of the Council for the Defense of Human Rights and Freedoms, based in Pristina, Kosovo. Dr. Gashi is a leading surgeon, professor and author in the former Yugoslavia. He has been a leader in the human rights struggle in Kosovo, especially since Kosovo declared its independence in 1991 from Serbia. In 1989, after becoming a professor of anatomy, he was named Dean of the faculty of Medicine at the University of Pristina, where he was also the Attending Surgeon General. Since 1991, however, Serbian authorities in Belgrade have either closed the hospitals in Kosovo or fired all non-Serbian physicians and staff. Thus the 92 percent Albanian majority in Kosovo have had to develop a system of underground clinics to treat its citizens.

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The Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe by law monitors and encourages progress in implementing the provisions of the Helsinki Accords. The Commission, created in 1976, is made up of nine Senators, nine Representatives and one official each from the Departments of State, Commerce and Defense. For more information about the Commission, please call (202) 225-1901.

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Dr. Gashi was a visiting scientist at the Cardiovascular Research Institute at the University of California, San Francisco, 1981-84. He has published seventy-five scientific and professional papers, and has authored five books, including The Denial of Human and National Rights of Albanians in Kosovo. Born in Prigode, Kosovo in 1950, Gashi speaks fluent English.

Background:

In the former Yugoslavia, Kosovo enjoyed federal status and considerable autonomy as a province of Serbia until 1990, when the Serbian authorities imposed direct rule and increased the degree of discrimination and repression of the Albanian population which constitutes the overwhelming majority of Kosovo's population. As conflict in other parts of the former Yugoslavia led to the complete collapse of that state in 1991, the Kosovar Albanians declared their independence and established their own political and social institutions, which have operated in the shadow of those of Serbia ever since. During this same time, repression of the population increased, especially in regard to arbitrary police brutality, and the proximity of the conflict in Bosnia-Herzegovina raised tensions and worries that major violence would come to Kosovo too.

The end of the Bosnian conflict in late 1995 created new possibilities for resolving differences between the Kosovar Albanians and the Serbian authorities, but continued human rights violations, polarized views on Kosovo's status and the actions of Albanian groups opposed to a passive resistance to Serbian control have stalled any momentum that did exist. Most recently, the political crisis in Serbia and more open differences between Kosovar Albanian political leaders have further complicated the picture, with new opportunities but also increased risks on the horizon.